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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that examined the concerns and professional development of beginning principals who participated in an administrator-preparation program are presented in this paper. The Leadership Enhancement and Development program (LEAD) is collaboratively developed and delivered by the University of Georgia and Gwinnett County schools. Methodology involved a survey of 53 program participants from four cohorts (from 1988-1991) and interviews with the 16 fourth-year participants now in leadership positions. Findings indicate that the cohort-prepared principals shared typical concerns and related developmental stages, both influenced somewhat by the cohort and special selection nature of the experience. The professional focus of the new educational leaders moved from administrative and management problems to people and pathology-of-schools issues, and finally to instruction and planning issues. Their time expenditures and mental focus developed within 3 years in the following stages--survival, control, routinization, educational leadership, and professional actualization. Recommendations are made for administrator preparation programs to increase awareness of the early career-concern pattern, to include guided field experiences and mentorships between new and successful principals, and to structure programs that take advantage of professional linkages. Two figures are included. (Contains 18 references.) (LMI)

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CONCERNS AND DEVELOPMENT OF COHORT ADMINISTRATORS: FOCI AND STAGES

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The data analyzed in this study were gathered as part of a longitudinal study currently being conducted by researchers at the University of Georgia. The purpose of the Georgia LEAD Study (GLS) is to document and describe the backgrounds, preparation, and career entry and development experiences of specially-selected, cohort-prepared leadership personnel. This program, Leadership Enhancement And Development, collaboratively developed and delivered by the University of Georgia and Gwinnett County Schools, is in its fifth year of operation. This paper presents what cohort leaders in preparation and beginning principals from a cohort program see as professional concerns and professional growth/development for leading.

Background of the Study

Gwinnett County School District was one of the most rapidly growing districts in the USA in the 1980's. While the growth rate has slowed slightly in the last couple of years and the District has lost its status as the fastest growing district in the country, its student population is expected to reach 100,000 by the year 2000 from its current (approx.) 68,000. As with many larger districts, Gwinnett selects a majority of its leadership personnel from within. Because of a strong desire to have an adequate supply of qualified personnel and to ensure that some

individuals eligible for entry level leadership positions (initially Lead Teacher and later Assistant Principal) were focused on instruction, District leadership personnel worked with key individuals at the University of Georgia during 1987-88 to plan a special leadership preparation program.

The LEAD program resulted from those deliberations. The general features of the program are a cohort of 12-15 individuals selected by district and building personnel in Gwinnett and a UGA professor, a year-long preparation program (35 quarter hours), and a 12-week internship. Successful completion of this program leads to certification for entry level leadership positions in Georgia. Participants are required to hold a master's degree and be recommended by their principal. During the internship, substitute teachers/counselors are employed so that the participants are available for full time interning in school leadership.

There have now been five cohorts selected: 14 participants in 1988; 13 in 1989; 12 in 1990; 14 in 1991; and 15 in 1992. Preparation has been completed and leadership certification obtained by cohorts 1988-1991. The 1992 cohort started preparation in the summer of 1992.

Procedures

Although several studies have focused on the preparation, orientation, and entry of beginning principals (Parkay & Hall, 1992; Daresh, 1988; Roberts, 1989; Vernetson & Hedges, 1989, for example), little work centers on the professional concerns or

challenges perceived by beginning educational leaders. Most illuminating to the current project were (a) the career development hierarchy of principals characterized by Parkay, Rhodes, and Currie (1990) and (b) the identification of two themes which reflect changes that principals undergo early in their careers: moving from positional to personal power, and from control to facilitation of behavior of others (Parkay & Hall, 1992).

Instrumentation

In the Fall of 1991, a set of instruments were constructed to initiate study of the experiences of participants (one year, two years, and three years after completing preparation) as they enter and advance in school leadership (or continue in teaching). The instrument items were based on (a) goals of the LEAD program; (b) patterns of questions fashioned after the national Beginning Principal Study conducted with 12 first-time high school principals in five states (Parkay, Rhodes, & Currie, 1990; Parkay & Hall, 1992); and (c) literature reflecting elements of cohort preparation, administrative preparation, and administrative entry (Ryan, et al, 1980; Daresh, 1988; Weindling & Earley, 1987a).

The GLS surveys focused on two kinds of questions. First, descriptive information about the personal and professional background of participants was requested. In addition, open-ended questions regarding the cohort preparation experience, others who played significant roles in the cohorts' preparation, and significant events during the first, second or third year

following preparation required respondents to probe their thoughts and feelings and reflect on their attitudes, values, behaviors, and effects of these on others.

Data Collection

Individuals in the 1988 cohort (who, in 1991, were entering their third year after preparation) responded to the entire set of surveys, 1989 cohort individuals responded to first and second year instruments, and members of the 1990 cohort completed only the first year questionnaire. At the time, 18 of 39 participants were in leadership positions and complete data were obtained from 16 of the 18 (89%); comparable data were obtained from 16 of 21 (76%) participants not in leadership positions: Overall, 32 of 39 (82%) reported. Background information was obtained from the four cohorts: 32 of 39 in cohorts 1, 2, and 3; and all 14 of cohort 4. Additional "next year" data was solicited from all members of the first three cohorts in the Fall of 1992 and was included in the analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the Fall of 1992 with participants who had entered leadership following preparation.

Finally, four of the 14 participants in 1991 (cohort 4) were recently appointed to leadership positions for 1992-93. First year beyond preparation data was solicited in the Fall of 1992 from all members of this cohort and added to the analysis. Basic demographic data for the fifth cohort (1992) were also obtained.

Data Analysis

Participants were queried at intervals over time in this cohort, longitudinal survey (Borg, 1983). Analysis of participant interviews proceeded according to the qualitative methodology of grounded theory research (Bogdan & Biklin, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1984). In addition, brief case studies based on identified themes (multiple-case study per Yin, 1984) formed a base for several portions of the larger study.

Research Questions

Drawing from the GLS survey and individual reports, three questions were addressed:

1. What professional concerns do cohorts and beginning administrators express, and over what events?
2. What strategies do they use to deal with such concerns?
3. Are there identifiable professional growth patterns within the cohort groups (e.g., Parkay & Hall, 1992)?

Initial analysis of the GLS survey and interview data indicate that, for cohort-prepared principals, there are typical concerns and related development stages, both influenced somewhat by the cohort and special selection nature of the experience.

Results

Results of this facet of the Georgia LEAD Study are presented in four sections: The first, second, and third year (after preparation) reports, and the report of interviews completed in the fourth year of the LEAD program.

The First Year Survey: LEAD Participants in Administrative Positions

Three sets of cohorts responded to the first year survey. The following questions provided much of the data presented here:

1. What differences in the way you view the nature/challenges of leadership can you identify?
2. What special challenge(s) or crisis (crises) or issue(s) have you encountered?
3. Can you identify ways in which you approach your work differently?

After entry into administrative positions, and into fall of the first year, more than half of the LEAD participants had difficulty in identifying a "new or different view" of the challenges of leadership. One noted, for example, "I'm too new to the role." Generally, respondents felt the job to be far more challenging than anticipated, and filled with coordinate detractors (e.g., the weight of administrative overload, handling great responsibility, loss of credibility from being out of the classroom, and working in a place which is too large and complex for anyone to help everyone).

The clearest, most significant leadership concern, cited by almost half of the respondents during the fall of their first year as administrators, was the <u>interpersonal demands</u> of working with students, teachers, and parents. As one new leader said,

> "I believe the greatest challenge a leader has is to deal with people effectively. I must listen, observe, and make decisions for people -- most importantly students."

Although "doing what's best for students" and counseling students was considered critical by some participants, the beginning administrators were initially more concerned about working with teachers; they described their attempts to be highly professional in all dealings with teachers, but also noted anxieties and insecurities about this work:

> "I look at the big picture now -- working with different professionals on a large scale."
>
> "The teachers will 'lead' the school. I plant the seed and coordinate the fertilizer."
>
> "The daily struggle to help and extend beyond methods and materials -- coping skills are a focus."
>
> "It is difficult to know how teachers now perceive my statements and efforts to assist."
>
> "I am very anxious to involve all teachers as much as possible."

Asked to name specific challenges or crises or issues at the fall of their first year, the new administrators told primarily of the overload of dealing with myriad, typical problems: changes in leadership team members, setting up new facilities, and as quoted here, a variety of negative and pathological situations:

> "--Lack of parental support. Since I represent the school, I have been insulted, threatened with law suits, etc."
>
> "--Numerous assaults, robberies, drug deals, problems with coaches, problems with parents."
>
> "There have been many (problems)...dealing with a child who had been beaten (for example)."
>
> "...Dealing with an emotionally ill father...."

The sheer weight, or overload, as well as the nastiness of such problems proved disturbing to many of the new leaders, whose responses reflected strong negative feelings.

Noted infrequently were crises or challenges of an instructional nature (e.g., teacher evaluation) or those related to development of programs for students.

Finally, participants were asked how they were approaching their work differently from in the past. The effect of the aforementioned crises and the ongoing onslaught of problems did not appear to change the beginning principals' approach so much as it changed their view of leadership. As one said, "I look at this principalship from a total perspective that I didn't before." Others echoed this, saying they were "more cognizant of the whole school, or total school and system picture," and had a "much broader view - wanting to know what and why of county/state/national actions in education, not just in my field." This "awareness" or "better view of school based decisions" served to motivate some of the beginners to "stay absolutely current so teachers and parents can count on me," to "remember techniques and skills I have learned and try to put them to use," or "be aware of current research." "by becoming more attuned to the roles of staff, leadership team members and teachers -- and more "supportive of their pressures," --these beginning administrators found themselves being more open-minded, questioning themselves, and ultimately becoming more dedicated, directed, and vision oriented.

The Second Year Survey

The two sets of cohorts responding to the second and third year surveys were presented with the following questions which provided much of the data presented here:

1. How do you now view the nature/challenges of educational leadership?
2. Is the job different from what you expected?
3. Have you encountered a special challenge/crisis/issue this year? (Please describe.)
4. What do you find least rewarding (or most painful) in this new role?
5. What have you been able to accomplish in your new role that you are proudest of?
6. Can you identify ways in which you have changed?
7. What do you wish had been included in the LEAD preparation?

During their second year in the principalship, program participants came to understand that positive change in schools is the result of the efforts of many people--not one leader--and that school leaders find themselves "in a critical time" when they "help faculty members prepare for and adjust to change":

> "Changes and creativity must come from within."
>
> "I used to think an administrator could orchestrate change. Now I know it has to come from teachers wanting and needing it."
>
> "Every day brings new challenges; probably the largest is finding ways to deal with so many personalities."

At the same time, administrators in their second year perceived needs which were broader than good communication or interpersonal effectiveness, including having a clear focus and time to work on complex matters of school improvement. The major challenge of the second year still included but went well beyond paperwork, discipline, and establishing rapport with faculty members to more substantive matters: support teams for student attendance, teaching methods, help for at-risk students, and building a solid, trusting relationship among team members.

In short, it was during their second year that administrators began to focus on student concerns/needs and staff development, but these matters were still overshadowed much of the time by legal issues, group and personnel problems, dealing with superiors, and other matters considered "daily crises." Even so, most administrators wanted to hold on to their vision:

> "I still believe that if a leader can convey his/her message and stand by his/her own convictions, (s)he can affect school structure and instruction."
>
> "I'm not a visionary because I'm just trying to adjust to a new school."

At this point, it seemed the goal was finally in view, but daily operations hampered attainment.

The Third Year Survey

The start of the third year found these "new" principals becoming more seasoned. They spoke of the challenge of leadership in deeper, more thoughtful terms:

"The individual child continues to grow as the focal point over the 'norm'."

"Our biggest challenge is preparing our charges for the future."

"The challenges are getting bigger with strategic planning coming into focus."

"The challenge of educational leadership is maintaining a vision in the midst of adversity and seeking ways to further your vision through teachers to benefit all children."

In the third year, a new, personal confidence emerged, and the administrators spoke of their accomplishments including "steering to build a professional climate," "gaining trust of a faculty," "being in classrooms frequently," "associating with the League of Professional Schools, the Parent-Teachers Association, the business partner," and staff development. This year, facing new challenges, crises, or issues every day seemed stimulating, rather than defeating, as in previous years.

During this third year, administrative and organizational matters still proved to be annoying, but received much less focus and attention than instructional matters. Finally, concerns and crises were mentioned less frequently, but included developing a leadership team, handling probation or remediation of weak teachers, and strategic or broad-based planning.

INTERVIEWS IN THE FOURTH YEAR:

LEADERS AT VARIOUS STAGES TELL THEIR STORIES

Four years after cohort preparation in the LEAD program, 65% of the interview participants were in leadership positions. In-

depth interviews with each leader revealed more detail about the challenges, crises and issues of entry and early practice of school leadership.

Much like the information revealed in the survey data, these leaders reported concerns ranging along a career development continuum. Asked about the special crises or issues of her first year of practice, one leader spoke of the difficulty of working with a weak teacher:

> "(The crisis was) how to accept and work to improve the marginal teacher. The marginal teacher is hard for me to accept because s(he) is just not what I want a teacher to be; you just don't feel real good about having a child in their class."

A third year leader, on the other hand, having enacted a dismissal of a weak teacher the year before, was somewhat more confident and philosophical about the task, even though it was compounded by the teacher's serious depression and spouse's loss of job:

> "A very hard thing to do but she was just not effective in working with our students."

Other third year leaders found challenges and concerns in a variety of significant issues: complicated politicking for a softball field, staff development for school-wide change, devoting much time to developmental work for outcomes based efforts, and even changing one's leadership style in order to get "the parts to work together as a whole" by teacher group work.

In general, the focus of concerns moved from interpersonal relationships, overload, survival, and administrative issues (year 1) to concerns about students and personnel especially in dealing with serious student problems, diversity, and students of varied backgrounds in year 2, and finally to deeper issues of school improvement and instruction (year 3). Regarding the latter, one third year leader cited four major school-wide thrusts, congruent with key components of her district's strategic plan, including: performance based pupil assessment, outcomes-based curriculum and instruction, use of technology, and use of time and opportunity.

It is interesting to note that many of these practicing leaders still spoke of the "immediate bond" among LEAD (cohort) participants when together, the way they didn't "have to talk to communicate," "how we swap ideas," how they have a tendency to call each other with questions, and the trust among the group members. To the degree that LEAD participants talked and consulted, they still derived benefits in their professional practice from having "weathered" together the storms of early training and entry into leadership.

DISCUSSION

Drawing from the results of the Beginning Principal Study (BPS) national survey, Roberts and Wright (1992) found that beginning high school principals' early change efforts emphasized student management and school climate issues. After "locking in" these apparently critical underpinnings -- and large amounts of

energy went into juggling and balancing the myriad elements -- the principals were then able to focus more attention on student needs and empowering the staff. Noticeably absent from the principals' first year efforts was any type of comprehensive evaluation or planning.

In another facet of the BPS (113 beginning high school principals in 16 states), Parkay, Rhodes, Currie and Rao (1992) used selected items from Weindling and Earley's (1987b) survey of head teachers in England and Wales to find that

> "Although beginning high school principals are confronted with many challenges related to internal and external issues, their greatest difficulty ...is realizing their educational goals. (They) do see themselves as providing leadership for their schools' curriculum and instructional programs, but a staggering array of problems deter them from devoting continuing attention and energy to this task."
>
> (Parkay, Rhodes, Currie, and Rao, p. 38)

Finally, in a study of the BPS principals' work in building school culture, Roberts (1992) found a lack of goal agreement and lack of focus on instruction during the principals' first year.

The present study echoes such findings. In surveys and personal interviews, 53 respondents (including interviews with 16 of the 18 in leadership positions) confirmed that their concerns are similar, although tempered by the support of their colleagues in the LEAD program [see, for example, R. Bruce (1993) and F. D. Carver (1993)]. The professional focus of the new educational leaders moves from administrative and management problems to people and pathology-of-schools issues, and then finally to

instruction and planning issues; essentially the time expenditures -- as well as the mental focus -- inverts within roughly three years (see Figures 1 and 2). Thus the beginning educational leaders' career development foci (concerns and time expenditure) parallel the Career Development Hierarchy developed by Parkay, Rhodes, and Currie (1990): The frustration and powerlessness and professional inadequacy of stage 1 (survival) gives way to setting priorities and managing the flow of demands (control, stage 2), and then to routinization (stage 3, stability). Eventually, educational leadership (stage 4) emerges and professional actualization (stage 5) occurs. The move from positional to personal power and from control to facilitation of behavior of others, is also noted in these three years (or phases) of beginning administrator development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This facet of the Georgia Leadership Study suggests that:

(1) New administrators should be made aware of the pattern of foci and ratio of time expenditures regarding typical early career concerns.

(2) Guided field experiences may help prospective administrators adjust to and learn to handle/juggle many of the routine demands of leadership, thus enabling them to move more quickly into deeper issues of school improvement and growth when they arrive in the principalship.

(3) Mentorships between successful principals and beginning principals should be facilitated, this provides a model of effective leadership as well as a supportive relationship during the critical early stages of administrator development.

(4) finally, cohort preparation of administrators should be structured so as to take full advantage of the collegial and professional linkages which naturally emerge during preparation entry, and early administrative practice.

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	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Primary Focus	●Overload ●Working with many, diverse people ●Pathology and negative situations	●student needs & concerns ●Teaching & staff development	●All instruction ●Teacher remediation ●Leadership team ●Strategic planning, school improvement
Secondary Focus	●Broad view of total school	●Legal issues ●Personnel coordination ●Superiors ●Daily crises	●Crises as challenges ●Administrivia

Figure 1. Primary and secondary foci of beginning educational leaders' concerns

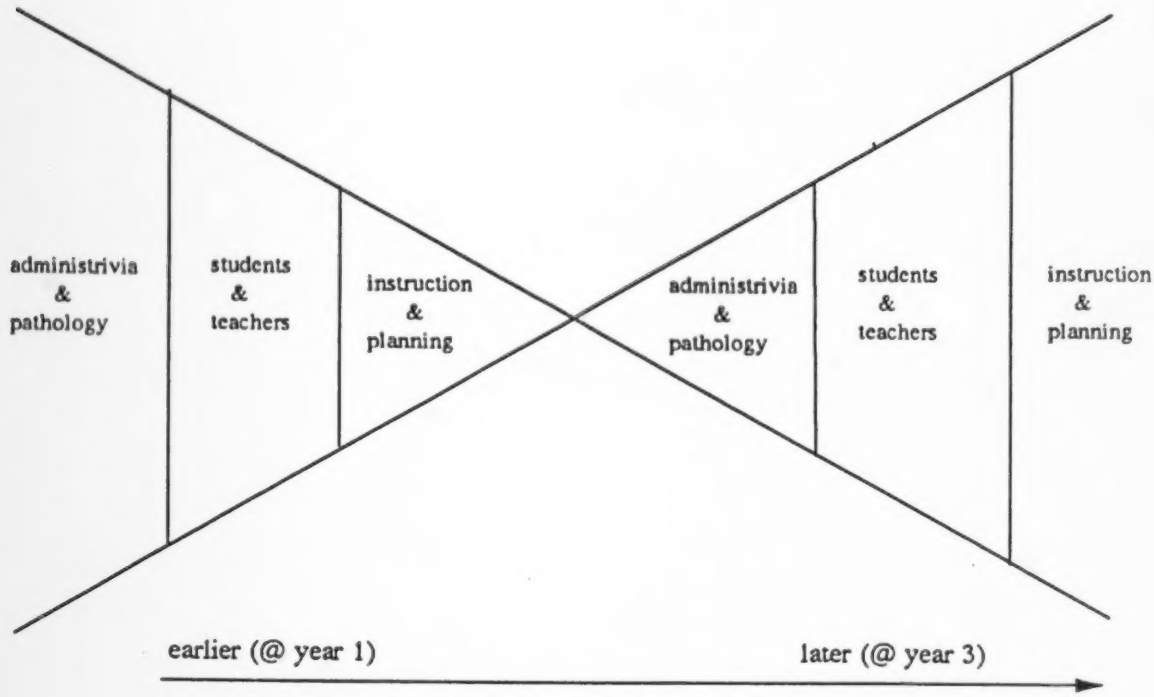

Figure 2. Change in ratio of time expenditure for various career foci of beginning educational leaders